

ARTICLE APPROVED
ON PAGE A-1

NEW YORK TIMES
12 MARCH 1981

U.S. Aides Say Cuba Cuts Arms To Salvador Left

Rebel Ammunition Stock Appears to Be Shrinking

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 11. — Administration officials said today that recently acquired information indicates that the anti-Government insurgents in El Salvador are running low on ammunition because of an apparent decision by Nicaragua and Cuba to reduce their assistance.

Although the officials said that the intelligence information was not conclusive, there was a growing belief within the Administration that the flow of arms to the left-wing rebels in El Salvador through Nicaragua had been drastically reduced in the last several weeks.

The officials said also that there has been less activity and involvement by Cuba in helping the El Salvador rebels during the same period.

U.S. Is Proceeding Cautiously

The Reagan Administration has been cautious in handling the intelligence information. It does not want to undercut its own justification for increased military aid for El Salvador but it is also tempted to assert that its "tough" position exposing Soviet-bloc assistance to the insurgents may have been decisive.

Some analysts in the Government trace the shortage of ammunition to the "final offensive" launched by the insurgents in January, before the Reagan Administration took office. The offensive failed to gain much public support and was stopped by Government forces.

Since then, the Reagan Administration has given considerable publicity to information it had gathered, largely from what were said to be captured documents, that is meant to demonstrate that the left-wing insurgents, at the instigation of Cuba, were given large quantities of arms and ammunition, from Soviet-bloc nations at the end of last year.

Most of the equipment, the United States charged, was American-made and was shipped from Vietnam to Cuba and then to Nicaragua. From Nicaragua, it was allegedly sent into El Salvador by land, through Honduras, or by sea and air.

Since the offensive in January and even

as the Administration was publicizing reports that large shipments of arms were reaching the guerrillas, the rebels themselves told reporters in El Salvador that they were running low on supplies.

American officials said Nicaragua, under heavy pressure from the United States, which has threatened to cut off economic assistance, has apparently stopped or sharply curtailed using its territory as a funnel for arms to the insurgents.

Officials were reluctant to say whether the present situation would be permanent.

A Difficult Logistical Problem

Without Nicaragua's cooperation, it would be logically difficult for Cuba to help the insurgents in El Salvador, the officials said. This may explain the slackening of the Cuban involvement, officials said. Some intelligence analysts believe that the failure of the January offensive may also have persuaded Cuba to avoid further large-scale involvement in El Salvador.

The reported problems for the insurgents comes against a major effort by the Reagan Administration to increase military and economic support for the El Salvador Government.

The Administration has authorized \$30 million in military help for the current

fiscal year and is seeking another \$66 million in the next fiscal year. The amount of emergency economic aid to be provided El Salvador is due to be announced by the end of the week, and it is expected to be between \$100 million and \$200 million.

Some officials believe that the Soviet leadership has become wary of major involvement in El Salvador and may have sent word to its East European, Vietnamese and Cuban allies to avoid further large-scale assistance to the rebels for fear of provoking an American military response against Cuba.

Brezhnev Didn't Mention the Issue

Administration officials said that Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, did not mention El Salvador either in his speech to the 26th Communist Party Congress or in his recent letters to President Reagan and other Western heads of government.

Mr. Brezhnev has been urging the start of an "active dialogue" with the United States, including a possible summit meeting with Mr. Reagan. This may be a factor in the Soviet refusal to be drawn into a public defense of the El Salvador rebels.

Several Administration officials also said that the Russians seem much more concerned at the moment over the continuing crisis in Poland, which could provoke Soviet military intervention, and in Afghanistan and are not likely to seek a confrontation in another part of the world where the United States is predominant.